

time to act on climate change. We are not given a planet with unlimited resources. It is our job to protect our waters and the people that rely on them, and that begins with finding real solutions to our climate crisis.

STOP SPENDING BILLIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I am on the floor again today with a prophetic political cartoon. In the cartoon, Uncle Sam is in a wheelchair, and he is at the edge of a cliff that is known as the fiscal cliff. Then, he has President Obama pushing him in the wheelchair; and then the donkey, representing the Democratic Party, is pushing Mr. Obama. And then the elephant, representing the Republican Party, is pushing the donkey and President Obama to push Uncle Sam off the cliff.

What is ironic is that Uncle Sam is yelling like he is excited: "I can see Greece from here." Well, we know what has happened to the economy of Greece. It is in total collapse.

Mr. Speaker, we are \$19.2 trillion in debt. I was here in the year 2000 when Bill Clinton left office. We were the majority in the House and the Senate. We were headed for a surplus. The debt in 2000 was \$5.6 trillion. Now we are here 16 years later and it is \$19.2 trillion.

The reason I bring this up is because we have an opportunity to stop spending billions and billions of dollars in Afghanistan. It is nothing but a waste. It is a waste of our young men and women in uniform. It is a waste of the taxpayers' money.

Recently, in an article in The Washington Post titled "Former Afghan Leader Karzai: Military Action Cannot Resolve Conflict in Afghanistan," the former President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, told The Washington Post recently that he doesn't think a military effort will bring peace to Afghanistan. He said: "We did it for the last 14 years and it didn't bring us that, so how do we know . . . military action will bring us that now?"

We are going on 15 years of being in that country—and the waste, fraud, and abuse in Afghanistan is worse now than it has ever been.

I think about the needs of our veterans, I think about the needs of our children, I think about the needs of our senior citizens, and so many other needs. We passed a bill yesterday to help with the mental health issues of America, yet it is not funded. But, yes, we will find the money to fund Afghanistan so we can continue to waste and spend the taxpayers' money and get nothing for it. It is just absolutely ridiculous.

Mr. Speaker, I voted against the Department of Defense bill last week simply because there is another \$43 billion

in there going to Afghanistan. This is OCO funds, it is slush funds, and it can't even be accounted for.

The taxpayers are frustrated with both parties and fed up because we are not doing our jobs. We are not doing what is necessary. We ought to be debating Afghanistan on the floor of the House and we ought to be saying, "Is it worth it or is it not worth it," and have an up-or-down vote. No, we just let it continue to go down this road with no end to it.

Mr. Speaker, I close this way, because to me this tells you more about Afghanistan than anything I could say today. Afghanistan is known as the graveyard of empires. Well, I know one empire that is headed for the graveyard, and it happens to be the United States of America. And if we continue to fund and waste the taxpayers' money in Afghanistan, then I hope that graveyard will have a headstone, and it will one day, that says "USA," because we will be in the graveyard of Afghanistan.

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. PRICE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PRICE of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a vice chair of the House Gun Violence Prevention Task Force and in solidarity with the majority of Americans who are demanding that Congress take meaningful action to prevent gun violence.

We all know the statistics. Whether it is through mass shootings that make the headlines or the unseen violence that happens daily on our streets, gun violence takes the lives of more than 30,000 of our Nation's citizens each year, a number that far exceeds other industrial countries.

Now, all these countries have their share of violent extremists and madmen, but only our country gives easy access to weapons of mass killing. And that makes all the difference for America.

Rather than seeking out commonsense solutions to address this crisis, the Republican majority continues to cower to the gun lobby and the firearms manufacturers. Now they plead the Second Amendment, but Constitutional Law 101 would tell us that all of our rights, including the precious freedoms of religion and speech, must be balanced to protect innocent third parties and to protect the safety of the wider community.

One commonsense measure we should all agree on is background checks to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, domestic abusers, and the dangerously mentally ill. You can't shout "fire" in a crowded theater because of your freedom of speech, and neither should you be able to buy a weapon if you have a history of violence and criminality.

In fact, almost 90 percent of Americans, including the majority of gun

owners, support universal background checks for all gun purchases. The problem is that our present background check system is rife with loopholes. Background checks are not required for private sales at gun shows. They are also not required for Internet sales.

Bipartisan legislation has been introduced by Representatives PETER KING and MIKE THOMPSON that would finally close this egregious loophole. It is an entirely sensible reform that would have a measurable impact on the safety of our schools, homes, and neighborhoods, without preventing law-abiding citizens from using guns for self-defense or recreational purposes.

Despite attracting 186 cosponsors, including several Republicans, the background check legislation has never been brought to the floor or even received a hearing in committee. It has been languishing for more than 15 months. Meanwhile, the shootings and the suicides and the massacres continue to accumulate.

My colleagues, we must do better. Our fellow citizens are totally fed up, both with the unspeakable killing and suffering and with a feckless Congress that hasn't lifted a finger to prevent it.

Now, this week, after intense public criticism and a historic protest by Democrats on the House floor, Republicans seemed for a while to be willing to hold a vote on legislation they claim would prevent suspected terrorists from purchasing firearms. After all, nearly 2,500 individuals on the terrorist watch list have successfully purchased weapons in this country.

But rather than embrace existing bipartisan legislation to actually fix the problem, Republicans put forth a woefully inadequate proposal that would require law enforcement and courts to grapple with unworkable processes, unreachable standards, to be completed in an unreasonably short period of time.

Their bill would allow suspected terrorists to receive firearms by default after only 3 days if the court is unable to work through a complicated process. That is the same flaw that allowed the White supremacist Charleston shooter to obtain the weapon that he used to murder nine people at Emanuel AME Church.

In other words, the bill is totally inadequate. Now, under pressure from their most extreme Members, Republican leaders refuse to even put this bill on the floor.

What should be on the floor is bipartisan legislation, H.R. 1076, that would permit the Attorney General to block gun sales to suspected terrorists. This legislation, based on a proposal from the Bush Justice Department, would still allow individuals to challenge the government in court to restore their gun ownership rights.

We don't have to choose between protecting our communities and respecting due process.

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And so, Mr. Speaker, we ask our colleagues how much longer must we